

Message Text

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ORIGIN EA-14

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TO AMEMBASSY RANGOON PRIORITY

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INFO AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

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E.O. 11652: GDS

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SUBJECT:CURRENT MILITARY SITUATION IN CAMBODIA

1. THE KHMER COMMUNIST (KC) DRY SEASON CAMPAIGN IN CAMBODIA KICKED-OFF ON SCHEDULE IN EARLY DECEMBER. FOR THE REST OF THE MONTH, THE COMMUNISTS' PRIMARY EFFORT WAS DIRECTED AT INTERDICTING TWO OF PHNOM PENH'S MAJOR RESUPPLY ARTERIES -- ROUTE 4 TO THE COUNTRY'S ONLY DEEPWATER PORT AT KOMPONG SOM AND ROUTE 5 TO THE RICE GROWING REGION IN THE NORTHWEST. THE CAPITAL'S THIRD MAJOR LIFELINE, THE
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MEKONG RIVER, REMAINED RELATIVELY FREE OF ENEMY HARASSMENT,

HOWEVER, AND TO THIS DATE CONVOYS ARE REACHING PHNOM PENH EVERY 8-10 DAYS.

2. DURING THE FIRST WEEK IN JANUARY, THE KC ALTERED THEIR STRATEGY AND FOR THE NEXT MONTH SHIFTED THE FOCUS OF THEIR ATTACKS TO PHNOM PENH'S DEFENSES. PRESSURE WAS APPLIED ON THE GROUND ALTERNATELY FROM THE NORTHWEST, NORTH, AND SOUTHWEST OF THE CITY. SIMULTANEOUSLY, KC GUNNERS INDISCRIMINATELY ROCKETED AND SHELLED PHNOM PENH TO INCREASE PSYCHOLOGICAL PRESSURE ON THE CITY'S INHABITANTS. DURING THE SEVEN-WEEK PERIOD WHEN THE KC WERE WITHIN RANGE, ABOUT 700 ROUNDS OF MOSTLY 122MM ROCKET AND 105MM HOWITZER FIRE WERE SPRAYED ON PHNOM PENH, RESULTING IN OVER 750 CIVILIAN CASUALTIES.

3. IN EARLY FEBRUARY, KC ATTACKS BEGAN TO WANE. THE GENERAL LULL IN COMMUNIST-INITIATED COMBAT ACTIVITY IS NOW APPROACHING ITS FOURTH WEEK, AND IT IS OBVIOUS THAT THE FIRST ROUND OF KC FIGHTING TO PENETRATE PHNOM PENH'S DEFENSES THIS DRY SEASON HAS FALTERED. THE COMMUNISTS HAVE BEEN PUSHED BACK BY THE INCREASINGLY AGGRESSIVE CAMBODIAN ARMED FORCES SOUTH AND NORTHWEST OF THE CAPITAL, AND ARE NOW OUTSIDE 105MM HOWITZER AND ROCKET RANGE OF THE CITY; THE LAST MAJOR SHELLING OCCURRED ON FEBRUARY 16.

4. KC PERSONNEL LOSSES HAVE BEEN HIGH. FOR EXAMPLE, AT LEAST 3,000 KC ARE ESTIMATED TO HAVE BEEN KILLED OR WOUNDED IN FIGHTING NORTHWEST OF THE CAPITAL ALONE. AN ADDITIONAL 10 TO 30 PERCENT OF THE COMMUNIST FORCE IN THIS AREA HAS ALSO DESERTED OR IS SICK. CONSEQUENTLY, THERE ARE NOW PROBABLY NOT MORE THAN 3,000 ENEMY TROOPS NORTHWEST OF THE CAPITAL - LESS THAN HALF OF THE ORIGINAL KC CONSIGNMENT THERE. ALTHOUGH CASUALTIES HAVE NOT BEEN AS EXTENSIVE, KC UNITS ELSEWHERE AROUND PHNOM PENH ALSO HAVE PROBLEMS. NOTICEABLY, THEY HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO COORDINATE THEIR ATTACKS ON THE VARIOUS FRONTS AND, AS A RESULT, GOVERNMENT FORCES HAVE BEEN ABLE TO MOVE UNITS FROM FRONT TO FRONT AND OVERWHELM THE PIECEMEAL KC EFFORTS.

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5. PERHAPS EVEN MORE IMPORTANT, THE COMMUNISTS ARE NOW UNDERCUTTING THEIR PRIMARY BASE OF SUPPORT, THE RURAL POPULATION. WHEN THE KC SHIFTED THEIR FORCES TOWARD PHNOM PENH, THEY EVIDENTLY OPTED FOR DRACONIAN MEASURES IN THE COUNTRYSIDE AS A MEANS TO SUPPORT AN ALL-OUT EFFORT AGAINST THE CAPITAL. FORCED CONSCRIPTION, COMMUNALIZATION OF FOOD PRODUCTION, RESTRICTIONS ON CIVILIAN TRAVEL, AND OPPRESSIVE TAXATION ARE THE MAIN

MEASURES BEING CARRIED OUT. BUDDHISM AND THE CLERGY HAVE ALSO FALLEN VICTIM TO KC REPRESSION. PROMPTED BY GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS INTO THE COUNTRYSIDE, THE VILLAGERS HAVE BEGUN A MASS EXODUS INTO FRIENDLY TERRITORY. LAST MONTH, SOME 45,000 CIVILIANS FLED TO THE PROVINCIAL CAPITALS OF KOMPONG THOM, SIEM REAP, BATTAMBANG, PURSAT, AND KOMPONG CHHNANG. THESE REFUGEES HAVE VOICED THEIR BITTERNESS TOWARD THE COMMUNISTS AND ARE SATISFIED TO BE UNDER GOVERNMENT CONTROL.

6. AS A RESULT OF THESE MULTIPLE PROBLEMS, THE KC APPEAR TO BE IN A STATE OF INDECISION. NEVERTHELESS, THEY STILL HAVE UNTIL THE END OF JULY TO REASSESS THE SITUATION, REBUILD THEIR FORCES, AND RENEW MAJOR ATTACKS BEFORE THE RAINY SEASON SIGNIFICANTLY HINDERS COMBAT OPERATIONS. IN THE MEANTIME, THE COMMUNISTS WILL PROBABLY

RESORT TO ECONOMY-OF-FORCE TACTICS IN MULTIPLE AREAS FOR THE PURPOSE OF TYING DOWN GOVERNMENT FORCES, THUS PREVENTING FANK FROM REGAINING LOST TERRITORY. INTERDICTION OF MAJOR LINES OF COMMUNICATION, TO INCLUDE INCREASED ATTACKS AGAINST MEKONG RIVER SHIPPING, IS ALSO ANTICIPATED.

7. THE CAMBODIAN ARMY, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAS THUS FAR WEATHERED THE KC DRY SEASON OFFENSIVE IN RELATIVELY GOOD SHAPE AND PHNOM PENH IS NO LONGER IN DANGER OF FALLING AS A RESULT OF A DIRECT ENEMY ATTACK. FANK MORALE HAS IMPROVED, WHILE THE KC ARE FINDING IT INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO GENERATE ENTHUSIASM FOR AGGRESSIVE COMBAT OPERATIONS. KISSINGER

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